

Small Group Discussion Guide on Vocation¹

The dictionary defines vocation as *a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation*. The term is virtually synonymous with “calling”, as it comes from the Latin *vocare* “to call”, the sense of being drawn into a particular field. Thus, a vocation is not simply a job; indeed, your current employment may or may not align with a deeper calling. Further, you may not be getting paid for your vocation: you may be studying in some kind of program, volunteering in your field of interest, or not drawing any income. The defining aspect of a vocation is an inward sense that you were “made for this”, as increasingly confirmed by your affinity and skills, and by other people and opportunities.

[Our church] wants to help our members understand and celebrate their sense of calling, confident that it is part of what it means to be human. Not only has God created us to worship him and live in community with others; he has shaped within us a need to work with dignity and purpose. Our work stewards and cultivates the treasures of creation, as part of what theologians call our “cultural mandate”. Though a fallen world sullies the inherent dignity of work—through what the Bible calls “thorns and thistles”—God’s mandate continues. And perhaps most amazing, what we do for Christ will be enjoyed forever.

We want to consider these issues in community, to help each other sort through what it practically means to live out our callings. One format would be for community groups to make this a focus once per month, beginning with a meal together. After the meal, have a group member share responses to some or all of the questions below, raise related themes they want to address, and/or take questions from the group. It is best to identify this person at least a week in advance, to give them time to prepare. Be sure to end the discussion with prayer for the group member and his/her vocation.

1. **Overview.** In a few minutes, tell the group about your vocation. What do you do? Who do you work for? What does a typical day (if there is such a thing) look like? Who do you work with? What related training or education did you receive?
2. **Calling.** When and how did you begin to feel drawn to this area? To what degree have you thought about your job as a calling from God, part of a larger “cultural mandate”? It’s ok to be honest! For most people, a job is something you do to pay the bills, or something you seemingly fell into. Thus, an underlying sense of calling may seem nebulous at best. Share honestly how you look at your vocation.
3. **Image.** Part of what it means that you are made in the image of God is that you “image” God to creation, similar to how a portrait portrays a person. In a fallen world,

¹ This guide was originally produced by leaders at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Arlington, VA and is used and adapted with their permission.

we are but marred images, but what attributes of God (e.g. mercy, care, order, justice, creativity, beauty, etc.) does your vocation particularly reflect to others?

4. **Idolatry.** Any good thing raised to an ultimate thing becomes an idol, i.e. something that we primarily look to for our identity, security and meaning. In what ways do you see your vocation as an idol, either to yourself or others?
5. **Community.** Do you have Christian community within your vocation, that is, people who speak the language of your calling and can offer insight, encouragement, or feedback into what you do? If so, what does that look like?
6. **Scripture.** Are there any biblical passages you've found particularly helpful, as inspiration or guidance in your field?
7. **Articles.** Are there any short articles on the intersection of faith and your vocation that you've found helpful? If so, feel free to summarize them or even share them in advance with the group to include in the discussion.
8. **Worldview.** A worldview helps explain the world we live in, answering such basic questions of life as *Why are we here? How do we explain the problems in my life and the world? What is the solution to those problems? Where are we ultimately going and does what I do now relate?* Everyone has spoken or unspoken answers to those questions. The Bible proclaims these:
 - *Creation:* God created us in his image, giving us inherent dignity and worth, for the purpose of glorifying him, not ourselves.
 - *Fall:* We are naturally alienated from God, such that everything we do is tainted by some form of selfishness: pride, ambition, greed, envy, malice, prejudice, lust, etc.
 - *Redemption:* In ourselves, we are unable to overcome our sinful natures and remove our guilt and shame. Yet at the cross, Jesus' life was graciously exchanged for ours.
 - *Restoration:* One day God's kingdom will come in fullness, but it has already begun in our hearts and lives. What we do now in faith for Christ will be enjoyed forever.

Your vocation likely has explicit or implicit answers to some or all of the above questions. How do they compare with a Christian worldview? Do they conflict in such a way as to bring any professional or social pressure on you?

9. **Artifacts.** Andy Crouch in *Culture Making* encourages Christians to help shape our world not simply by *condemning, critiquing, copying or consuming* culture but through *creating* "artifacts", i.e. cultural goods, whether they are chairs, language, laws, art—or even omelets. Are there any vocational artifacts that you've considered creating, that in some small way help create culture?

10. **Influence.** James Davison Hunter in *To Change The World* calls most Christian attempts at cultural engagement inadequate, concluding they have mostly served to marginalize the Church, with little impact on culture. Instead, he calls us to “faithful presence” in our fields, at whatever level. Though this would include living moral lives as a biblical witness to others, Hunter calls us to participate in, identify with, and humbly influence the existing structures of society. What might that look like for you in your vocation? In your field, what makes you passionate/angry/excited enough to call you to be a positive influence? What dilemmas might you face? Consider ways you could work with other Christians in your vocation towards a common purpose.